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CHANGE OF SEX AS A HINDU STORY MOTIF¹

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THE NOTION that a human being may suffer a change of sex is familiar to the West both from classical literature, in the legends concerning Teiresias and others and in sections of Pliny's Natural History, and also from Teutonic mythology. In India, too, it has existed from remote antiquity, and instances appear in very early strata of the literature. The earliest illustration of change of sex occurs, it is true, in connection with a god, not a human being. Indra, in love with an Asura woman named Dānavī Vilisteṅgā, went to live among the Asuras, assuming a female form among women, and a male form among men.² There is nothing essentially surprising in this episode, for Indra, whose great power is *māyā* (magic, sorcery), often abandons his true form for others,³ and even takes a woman's form, as in the familiar story of how the gods monopolized the *amṛta* (drink of immortality), where as a heavenly nymph he beguiled the Asuras while the gods drank all the precious beverage. Indeed, it would hardly be remarkable for

¹ This essay is in continuance of the encyclopedic treatment of Hindu fiction by Professor Bloomfield and his pupils. For titles, see *AJP*, 44. 97, footnote, and *AJP*, 47. 205, footnote. After this paper was in type I saw proof sheets of volume 7 of Penzer's *Ocean of Story*, which contains the Vetāla story appearing later in this paper. Penzer has a long note, pp. 222-233, discussing "Change of Sex." His Indian material is much less full than mine, but he has several references which I had not found. These I have included in the footnotes, giving him due credit. He also gives a number of interesting parallels from outside of India.

² Brāhmaṇa legend; see Weber, *Indische Studien*, 3. 479; Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, I. 125. Echoed in Atharva Veda, 7. 38. 2. Indra very nearly figures in another story of change of sex as told by the Maratha poet Mahipati (see in Kincaid, *Tales of the Saints of Pandharpur*, p. 119). Indra asked Parvati how she could endure a husband who always wore the garb of an anchorite. Parvati, angered at this impudence, cursed him to bear a woman's name and be turned to water. Indra propitiated Shiva, who interceded with Parvati, and she modified her curse. He did not wholly turn to water, but the river Indrayani sprang from his body.

³ As in his fight with Vṛtra in Rig Veda, 1. 32. 12.

any god at all to effect such a change in himself; for gods, by definition, have supernatural powers, of which this may well be one.

But it is when we find such a change taking place in human beings that our attention is arrested, and the phenomenon then becomes one that is worthy of study. We need not concern ourselves with instances of disguise, of a person of one sex assuming the garb of another, a sufficiently commonplace idea in fiction, which has after all nothing to do with our theme. Closer yet still not identical is the phenomenon of a person of one sex, by means of a magic power (*parakāyapraveśa*), abstracting the soul from his own body and entering the body of someone of the other sex.⁴ But this, too, is a different phenomenon, belonging to another paragraph of Hindu fiction motifs.⁵ We are here dealing only with genuine change among human beings and the beliefs on which that notion is based.

Of these beliefs some are obviously folkloristic; others are apparently metaphysical or literary refinements developed at the demand of religion or story. A brief but incomplete mention of the means by which the change is effected appears in the *Kathā Sarit Sāgara*:⁶ "So by the fiat of a deity or by charms and drugs, a man may sometimes become a woman, and *vice versa*." This statement should be amplified; for there are at least the following five clearly discernible means.

First, by bathing in an enchanted pool or stream. This popular notion appears as early as the Bāudhāyana Śrāuta Sūtra and persists in India to-day.⁷ These pools are sometimes regarded as wishing-pools and at other times as pools that have been enchanted by some deity.⁸

⁴ An amusing instance of such a change appears in the *prahasana* Bhagavadajjukīyam, edited by P. Anujan Achan (1925), where a saint and a courtesan exchange bodies.

⁵ See Professor Bloomfield's paper "On the Art of Entering Another's Body: A Hindu Fiction Motif," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 56. 1-43.

⁶ Tawney's translation, II. 305.

⁷ See mention of such streams and pools in Enthoven, *Folklore of Bombay*, pp. 100, 104; Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1926), p. 279.

⁸ Similarly enchanted pools change men to monkeys and monkeys to men, as in Pañcākhyānavārttika 37; Prabandhacintāmani, Tawney's translation,

Second, by the curse or blessing of a deity directed at a specific individual—a curse to change man to woman; a blessing to change woman to man.

Third, by exchanging one's sex with a Yakṣa, a creature that is unique in possessing the power to make this remarkable exchange.⁹ These Yakṣas are semi-divine beings of a rather low order, ruled by the god Kubera. Sometimes, secondarily, the place of the Yakṣa is taken by a Rākṣasa (ogre), for the two are often confused in fiction.

Fourth, by magic—usually by putting a pill in the mouth. When the pill is removed, the original sex is restored.

Fifth, by the power of righteousness or in consequence of wickedness. An Act of Truth or the favor of a saint effects a change up, that is, woman to man; an impious wish effects a change down, man to woman. The instances of this means, as far as I have seen, are confined to Buddhist literature.

There are times when the change is expected and times when it is not; there are times when it is welcome and again other times when it is not. Thus, when a man becomes a woman in consequence of a curse or an impious thought or from bathing in an enchanted pool, it is both unexpected and unwelcome. On the other hand, when by chance a Yakṣa is found who is willing to exchange sex with a woman or a pool is accidentally discovered that converts a female into a male, the change may be equally unexpected, but at the same time it is welcome. Last, when a Yakṣa by deliberate propitiation is made willing to exchange sex or when a pill is used or an Act

p. 178; *Parīśiṣṭaparvan* II. 407-430 (in a footnote to the English analysis of this tale Leumann refers to *Kalpabhāṣya* Peḍhiya 283 and *Vīśeṣāvaśyaka Bhāṣya* by Jinabhadraganin 1. 862). In the story of Ambada (translated by Krause, *Indische Erzähler*, IV. 54, 59) a pool is mentioned that restores human form to a man who has been magically changed to a cock, and to a woman who has been changed to a she-ass. In Knowles, *Folk-Tales of Kashmir*, p. 463, a prince sees a monkey dive into a spring. Shortly afterwards a beautiful girl emerges from the pool and kisses him. She is presumably the monkey, although the story does not state so.

⁹ Yakṣas have the power to assume any form they wish. In *Kathā-ratnākara* 87 a boy who has frequently been refused help by a stingy man of wealth propitiates a Yakṣa and obtains this power. He assumes the form of the niggard, gets entrance to his house, has the real owner denied admittance as being an impostor, and for a long time enjoys his wealth and wives.

of Truth performed, the change is both expected and welcome. But never is the change both expected and unwelcome; for in that case it would be avoided. In this connection, it is interesting to note the acceptance by the literature without argument that a change from woman to man is always desirable while the reverse is always undesirable. The one exception, appearing in the Mahābhārata story of Bhaṅgāsvana, is definitely regarded as a paradox.

The purposes for which the motif is employed are as follows: to show that mother love is stronger than father love; to show that women experience greater pleasure in sexual intercourse than men; to obtain a warrior against whom the invincible hero Bhīṣma will not fight—he will not fight a woman, and he refuses to regard the transsexed warrior as any but a woman; to make good the pretence that a girl is a boy; to obtain a lover access to his beloved; to disguise oneself for purposes of safety; merely to adorn a tale; to illustrate the potency of a certain sacrifice; to be a god's means of wreaking vengeance on a human being; to demonstrate the harm of sensual thoughts; to effect an advance in the scale of life on the way to ultimate Buddhahood; to accomplish religious proselytism—specifically, to convert a Hindu to Mohammedanism.

Without further delay, now, we may turn to an examination of the literary illustrations of the five means by which change of sex is effected.

BATHING IN ENCHANTED WATER

A. *Change of Man to Woman—Unexpected, unwelcome*

The earliest example in Indian literature of a human being experiencing change of sex appears in the Bāudhāyana Śrāuta Sūtra.¹⁰ King Ṛtuparna, son of Bhaṅgāśvina, king of Śaphāla, once celebrated the Agniṣṭut sacrifice, from which Indra was excluded. Thus he incurred Indra's hatred. One day as King Ṛtuparna was hunting, hot and perspiring, he plunged into the water. Indra, watching for such an opportunity, at once transformed him into a woman, who took the name Sudevalā. As a woman Sudevalā continued to rule the kingdom and had sons—as Ṛtuparna he had already had several. Indra, to complete his vengeance, set the two

¹⁰ See Caland, *Ueber das rituelle Sūtra des Bāudhāyana*, p. 20; also in *WZKM*, 17. 354.

groups of boys to quarrelling, and they slew each other. As Sudevalā sat weeping among them, he approached and asked, "Do you like this?" "How could I like it?" she asked in return. "Just so," he replied, "I was displeased that you excluded me from the sacrifice. But choose which sons you would like to have restored." She answered, "Those which I had as a woman." Hence, adds the story, they say that mother love is stronger than father love.¹¹

A different version of the same tale appears in the Mahābhārata XIII (Anuśāsana parvan), 12.¹² Yudhiṣṭhira asks Bhīṣma whether man or woman gets the greater pleasure in sexual intercourse. Bhīṣma replies by telling the story of the Rājārṣi Bhaṅgāśvina,¹³ who, through the performance of the Agniṣṭut sacrifice, had obtained a hundred sons. But he had incurred the displeasure of Indra, and one day while hunting, as he plunged into the water for a bath, he was changed to a woman. He resigned the kingship to his hundred sons and retired to the forest; but there he, now she, met an ascetic and became the parent of another hundred sons, whom she took to the city and made co-partners in the rulership with the first hundred. Indra, at this, got the two factions quarrelling and they killed each other. He then went to the woman, who was both father and mother, and, since she had appeased him, he offered to revive one set. She chose those whom she had had as a woman; for the woman's love is the greater. Indra then offered to restore her to manhood. But she preferred to remain a woman, because, she said, a woman has more pleasure in sexual intercourse than does a man.¹⁴

The enchanted pool appears again in the modern Hindustani

¹¹ For this belief about women in India, see Meyer, *Das Weib im altindischen Epos*, p. 284, note 2.

¹² For the parallelism see Caland *WZKM*, 17. 351 ff., and Winternitz *WZKM*, 17. 292 f.

¹³ Variant of the name Bhaṅgāśvina in the version of the Bāudhāyana Ś S.

¹⁴ Hertel, *Indische Märchen*, p. 371 and note, thinks that the presence of the question about sexual intercourse establishes the priority of the Mahābhārata version over that of the Bāudhāyana Ś S. His argument seems to be that similar stories with sex change, originating with the same question and ending with the same answer, appear in classical literature. I cannot agree in considering this valid ground for drawing such a conclusion, although I do agree with his implication that the Bāudhāyana version is not necessarily more nearly original merely because the *text* of the Bāudhāyana Ś S. seems older than that of Book XIII of the Mahābhārata. But

romance, *Rose of Bakawali*,¹⁵ where it changes a man to a woman. She gets married and has a son. She goes to perform purifying ceremonies in another pool and comes out a negro. A negress whose upper lip touches her nose, lower lip touches her chin, ears hang down to her shoulders and breasts to her belly, claims him as her husband. At the first opportunity he plunges into another pool and comes out in his original form. This pool, he sees afterwards, is the one he had entered first, which had mysteriously vanished. He then resolves to bathe no more, at least not by plunging into strange pools.

A modern oral tale, also showing the change back to the original sex, occurs in Baluchistan.¹⁶ It starts with the legend of the mystical visit of the prophet Mohammed to heaven. When he returned to earth, he related how all had happened in a night and yet he had passed eighteen years in heaven. Then a Hindu grain-dealer said, "See what a great man he is and what great lies he tells!" On a certain day it happened by God's will that the shop-keeper had caught a fish, which he gave to his wife to scrape, saying, "I am going to the creek to bathe and fetch a pot of water." He went to the river, took off his cap and laid it down with his shoes and waterpot, and went into the river to bathe. He dipped under the water, and when he emerged he perceived that he had become a woman. His clothes were not lying there nor his waterpot; it was another land, another place, and he was a woman. He sat down naked on the bank, and a horseman came by and made him

there seems to be reason for thinking the Sūtra version the older: (1) all other things being equal, we should expect anything in it to be older than anything in Mahābhārata XIII; (2) the Mahābhārata version is easily explainable as that of the Sūtra expanded; but it is hard to look upon that of the Sūtra as merely a reduced form of that in the Mahābhārata, abbreviated at each end; (3) the moral of the story in the Sūtra (that mother love is greater than father love) is more general, more likely to impress itself upon human consciousness and hence likely to originate earlier, and more calculated to inspire a "just so" story than is the moral of the Mahābhārata tale (that women get greater pleasure in sexual intercourse than do men). For another sex change story pointing the moral that mother love is stronger than father love, see Dhammapada Commentary, III. 9 (Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, II. 23 ff., and analyzed later in this paper).

¹⁵ See Garcin de Tassy, *Allégories*, p. 372 ff.

¹⁶ Dames, *Popular Poetry of the Baloches*, p. 159.

mount on his mare's saddlebow in front of him, carried him away to his own town and married him. Seven children were born to him. One day he took the last child's clothes to the river bank to wash them, and having washed them spread them out in the sun, and went into the water to bathe. He dived under the water, and on coming out saw that he was a man again, and was back in the first place; the waterpot, the cap and the shoes were all lying there; he was that very shopkeeper. He went back quickly to his home and saw his wife scraping that same fish on one side. His wife said, "Didst thou go to the river, or turn back half-way? Thou hast come very quickly." "Woman," he said, "I have passed many years," and he told her all his story. Then he confessed that the Prophet's tale was true, and became a Musalman.¹⁷

B. Change of Woman to Man—Unexpected, welcome

The tales above illustrate the change from man to woman, which as always is the case in such circumstances is unwelcome. In the

¹⁷ A parallel story, but without change of sex, is found in Knowles, *Folk-Tales of Kashmir*, p. 17. A Brahman, who had prayed to know the state of the departed, one day while at a river performing his ablutions was deprived of his spirit, which entered the infant son of a cobbler (this is not entry into another person's body, but is rebirth). The child grew up, married, had a family, and then one day became aware that, though in a cobbler's body, he was really a Brahman. Abandoning all he journeyed to a far land, where it happened the king had just died. He was made king and reigned until somehow the people learned that he was a cobbler. The king burnt himself in shame (the disastrous outcome of having a double personality), and then his spirit returned to his Brahman body which was still lying on the river bank. When he got back home, his wife said, "How quickly you have performed your ablutions this morning." The Brahman was amazed at the situation but kept his silence. A few days later a refugee happened by from the country where the Brahman as the cobbler's son had been reigning. He told the story of the strange events there, and thus the Brahman's marvellous experience was confirmed as real. Although Penzer does not seem to know these stories, he relates a story that is their obvious source (*Ocean of Story*, vol. 7, p. 224), drawn from the *1001 Nights* (Burton, *Supplemental Nights*, vol. 6, p. 13); compare with this Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, 5th ed., 1860, pp. 468 f.; see also Penzer's note to Vetala 18, quoting there the version of the *Forty Veziers*. Penzer accepts the theory advanced by Gibb that the source of these illusion stories is to be found in the dreams of hashish smokers.

following cases the change is from woman to man, is also unexpected, but is at the same time welcome.

The common type of tale under this head appears in the *Kathā-prakāśa*.¹⁸ Two queens, while pregnant, pledged their children in marriage provided they should be of opposite sex. Each bore a daughter, but one gave out that hers was a son. In the course of time the marriage was celebrated and then the truth came out. The father of the bride wished to declare war, but his ministers persuaded him to try to ambuscade the pretended bridegroom while out hunting. During the course of the hunt the groom's horse ran away. At night it came to a stop under a fig tree. There a bird was nesting with four young, one of whom told the other the story of the two princesses married to each other. The bridegroom overheard it all.¹⁹ One bird then asked if there was no means by which the maiden could be made a man. The other replied that if she could bathe in the well below the tree and drink of it, she would become a man. Of course the princess did so.

A similar tale occurs in the *Kathāratnākara*,²⁰ although there the marriage agreement is made between a queen and a minister's wife. When the children are twelve years old and the time has come for the marriage to be celebrated, the minister puts his pretended son on a horse of inverted training (stock fiction motif), one that goes ahead when the reins are pulled in and *vice versa*, and lets it loose, hoping thus in ridding himself of the child to rid himself also of the ill-luck that has come with it. If by any mischance the child should return, he is prepared to meet the situation by declaring that a demon has changed its sex.²¹ The horse stops near a bathing place, where the girl sees a number of she-apes. These plunge into the pool and emerge as males. The girl does the same, and returns home; and so the story has a happy conclusion.²²

¹⁸ See Eggeling in *Gurupūjakāumudī*, p. 121 ff. Similar stories are found in the literature of Western Asia, as in the 1001 Nights.

¹⁹ See paper by Professor Bloomfield on "Overhearing," *AJP*, 41. 309 ff.

²⁰ Hertel's translation, Vol. 2, p. 33.

²¹ Illustration of belief in the power of Yakṣas to change sex (see below).

²² This story illustrates how separate fictional elements are taken from their original settings and recombined in a new narrative. It contains the following elements. (1) Like the story of Śikhāṇḍin, in the *Mahābhārata*, the hero was born a girl, fled to a forest, and there obtained a different sex.

The same tale appears in folk variants in modern India, reported by Crooke.²³ One of them is of "a Rajput girl who was sacred and was sent to the seraglio of the Emperor of Delhi. She escaped and took refuge in a Devi temple where she was changed into a boy. Others say she was married in the guise of a boy, and in her despair tried to drown herself in the Jumna, but her sex was immediately changed and everyone was satisfied."

There is a sophisticated variant in Old Gujarati.²⁴ The two girls are married, and on the wedding night the groom turns his back on the bride. The next morning, in chagrin, she complains to her mother, who in turn informs the king.²⁵ The latter advises

Śikhaṇḍin exchanged sexes with a Yakṣa, an incident which has left its trace in our story (for the story of Śikhaṇḍin, see the section below, "Exchanging Sex with a Yakṣa"). (2) Apes jumping into a pool, reflecting the familiar Jain apologue of the monkeys who jumped into a pool and emerged as human beings. In the apologue, the male, not satisfied, jumps in again, hoping to be transformed into a god, but instead he is changed back to a monkey. Then the pool vanishes. In the sequel the female becomes queen of the country. The male is captured by strolling actors and made to dance at the end of a rope. One day he performs before the king and queen. He and his former mate recognize each other, whereupon he sorrows for his foolishness, while she, somewhat complacently, gives him a lecture (Bhavadeva Suri's *Pārśvanāthacaritra* VI. 635 ff., and VII. 452 ff. For other more or less complete illustrations of the same apologue, see the references above in footnote 8. One of the most interesting is that of the *Prabandhacintāmaṇi*, Tawney's translation, p. 178, in which a she-ape is shot through the palate by a hunter. The body falls into a holy wishing pool, whence it is reborn as that of a human being; but the head, not having fallen into the pool, is reborn that of an ape, although attached to a human body. Later the head of the ape is found and thrown into the pool; whereupon the reborn head also becomes human). In the *Kathakośa*, Tawney's translation, p. 110, a bathing place is mentioned that has the power of transforming animals to humans. The reverse change of man to monkey appears in the *Rāuhineyacaritra* (see H. M. Johnson in *Studies in Honor of Maurice Bloomfield*, p. 192).

²³ *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1926), p. 279, quoting from the *Bombay Gazetteer* 7. 612, and the *Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India* 7. 6. The latter is quoted here.

²⁴ *Pañcākhyānavārttika* 35. A folk variant appears in Penzer, *Ocean of Story*, vol. 7, p. 230, quoted from the Baroda volume of the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* (vol. 7, 1883, p. 612).

²⁵ Stock incident in a large group of stories in which a woman, impersonating the other sex, has with many other adventures the opportunity

that the groom be invited to the palace to bathe and turned over to a masseuse to have his virility tested. Just as the masseuse is about to anoint him, a cry arises, "A tiger has got into the cow herd!" At once the royal army is marshalled and with it goes the groom. The tiger flees; the army returns; but the groom, reckless of life, pursues and kills it, and starts home with the head as a trophy. On the way she comes to a bathing place of Devi. Not knowing the properties of the water, she starts to bathe, but first lets her mare enter the water. It at once becomes a stallion. She, too, jumps in and becomes a male. He (no longer she) returns home, where his new state brings great joy to his parents. Then he goes to the palace to complete the interrupted bath. The masseuse performs all her lewd arts, removes the doubts, and the marriage becomes a success.²⁶

CURSE OR BLESSING

It would naturally seem that a divinity could at his pleasure convert members of one sex to another; and such is probably the belief. Nevertheless the exercise of this power is comparatively rare. We have seen in the story of King R̥tuparna above that

to collect several wives. When questioned about her coldness, she replies that she is on a mission and cannot have sexual intercourse until it is completed. She finally, with great magnanimity, bestows all these wives upon her own husband. See, for example, Frere, *Old Deccan Days*, p. 23; Dracott, *Simla Village Tales*, p. 135; Swynnerton, *Romantic Tales from the Panjab with Indian Nights' Entertainment*, p. 471; *Indian Antiquary* 20. 183; Parker, *Village Folk-Tales of Ceylon* II. 151.

²⁶ In Enthoven, *Folklore of Bombay*, pp. 100, 104, 339, there are mentioned wishing pools in the Bombay Presidency where people have bathed and had their sex changed, but the stories are too thin to justify retelling. For the most part they merely reflect tales that are told at some length in this paper. Some of Enthoven's references are mentioned also in Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1926), p. 279. Quite secondary seems to me to be an allusion in T. C. J., *Folk-lore and Legends, Oriental*, p. 186 ff., to two springs. If a man drinks of one, he becomes a woman; if a woman drinks of the other, she becomes a man. The drinking to produce change of sex is obviously secondary to bathing. Penzer, *Ocean of Story*, vol. 7, p. 224, mentions a sex-changing well in the *Book of Sindibad* (see Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes*, vol. 8, p. 43; and Clouston, *Book of Sindibad*, pp. 80, 156, 299); and in the *1001 Nights* (Burton, vol. 6, pp. 145 ff.). Whoever drinks of its water suffers change of sex.

Indra changed him to a woman but only when he bathed in a pool that had been enchanted. But it is not always necessary that the victim should do some injudicious act and so render himself liable to the change. The classic instance of change by curse or blessing occurs in the story of the parentage of Purūravas.²⁷ The references for this story are many, with their germ in Rig Veda 10. 95. 18, where Purūravas is called Āila, which might mean the son of Ila (masculine) or Ilā (feminine). Again, in the Mahābhārata 1. 75. 18-19, it is said that Purūravas was brought to being in Ilā; "she, so we have heard, was both his father and his mother." In neither of these places is the story related, but it is told, with many variations, in at least the following works: Kūrma Purāṇa 20. 4 ff.; Liṅga Purāṇa 1. 65. 19 ff.; Matsya Purāṇa 11. 40 ff.; Padma Purāṇa 5. 8. 75 ff.; Viṣṇu Purāṇa 4. 1. 8 ff.; Brahma Purāṇa 7. 3 ff.; Harivaṁśa 1. 10. 3 ff.; Vāyu Purāṇa 85. 3 ff.; Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 111. 6 ff.; Bhāghavata Purāṇa 9. 1. 3 ff.; Rāmāyaṇa 7. 87 ff.; and there is a summary of it in connection with another story of change of sex in the Kathā Sarit Sāgara (Tawney's translation II. 305). It would be superfluous to relate all of these many versions; but I shall quote that of the Liṅga Purāṇa as being the most representative.

Ilā was the eldest and choicest (daughter of Manu). Through the grace of Mitra and Varuṇa she became a man Sudyumna. Once in a reed thicket at the command of Shiva he became a woman. Through Ikṣvāku's horse-sacrifice she became a *kimpuruṣa*, in which state she (he) was known as Ilā and Sudyumna. In the palace of Budha he (she) was alternately man and woman. Budha, seizing his opportunity, united with her, and she bore him Purūravas. As Sudyumna he had three sons.²⁸

²⁷ For a lengthy discussion of this story in its many versions, see Hertel in WZKM 25. 153. Hertel's paper is criticized by Keith, JRAS, 1913, pp. 412 ff.

²⁸ A story which at first sight might seem to be a reflection of this legend is reported by Bompas and Bodding, *Folklore of the Santal Parganas*, p. 74 ff. Two dead fish laugh when brought into the presence of a king. This motivates a longish story, the final solution being that the fish laughed because of all the king's queens only the eldest was a woman. The others had become men. On investigation this was found to be the case. This is an obvious corruption of the well-known Śukasaptati tale of the laughing fish, in which the fish laughed because among the queens were

The chief variants are mostly in the nature of commentary on the incidents of the tale told above. In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa it is said that Manu had sacrificed desirous of getting a son, but through a slip in the sacrificial ritual he had secured only a daughter. Again, in the Matsya Purāṇa it is said that Ilā was originally male, but had unwittingly wandered into a thicket that had been cursed by Shiva to turn all male creatures entering it into female. Some Rishis had once surprised Shiva in that thicket in a love passage with Parvati. In the same text it is stated that Ilā-Sudyumna as a *kimpuruṣa* was alternately male for a month and female for a month.

Another passage of the Rig Veda (8. 1. 34) furnishes the starting point for a tale that is, however, still born. Allusions to it appear in the Sāṅkhāyana Śrāuta Sūtra 16. 11. 16 f., the Bṛhaddevatā 6. 40 f., and the Sarvānukramaṇī on RV 8. 1.²⁹ Sāyaṇa relates the story in his commentary on RV 8. 1. 1. 34. Āsaṅga, owing to the curse of the gods, was turned into a woman, but afterwards, by the favor of Medhyātithi, was restored to manhood through the power of penance.³⁰

EXCHANGING SEX WITH A YAKṢA

Exchanging sex with a Yakṣa or other superhuman being appears in the literature as early as the Mahābhārata V. 186-192, in the story of Śikhaṇḍin. King Drupada had undertaken penance to gain a son who should revenge him upon the invincible Bhīṣma. But instead of a son he received, through the grace of Shiva, a daughter who was, however, destined to be transformed into a man.

many men disguised as women. The oral tale, however, shows the folk belief in the possibility of sex change. For the Sukasaptati tale, see Benfey, *Klein. Schr.* II. 156; cf. stories in the Kathā Sarit Sāgara, Tawney's translation, I. 24; Knowles, *Folk-Tales of Kashmir*, p. 484; *Indian Antiquary* 16. 66 and 22. 321.

²⁹ See Sieg, *Sagenstoffe des Rigveda*, p. 40 ff.

³⁰ In Socin, *Die Neuaramäischen Dialekte von Urumia bis Mosul*, p. 221 f., it is related that two men who had hunted a gazelle for three days were by its curse changed to women. Seven years later these two women again hunted the same gazelle for three days and were changed to men. In both cases it is significant that the curse was pronounced only when a body of water was between the gazelle and the hunters; thus indicating a connection with the notion of change of sex by bathing in an enchanted pool.

Drupada gave her out for a male and named her Śikhaṇḍin. As such she was betrothed to the daughter of King Hiranya-varman, but this princess discovered the deceit and revealed it to her father, who set out enraged to destroy both Drupada and Śikhaṇḍin. While Drupada was preparing for battle, Śikhaṇḍin went to the forest to propitiate the Yakṣa Sthūṇākarna and get him to exchange sexes with her. She succeeded, although Sthūṇākarna stipulated that the sexes should be re-exchanged after the danger had passed. Śikhaṇḍin was thus able to prove himself a male and Hiranya-varman was appeased and withdrew his army. Sthūṇākarna, however, was less fortunate. The god Kubera, lord of the Yakṣas, discovered what had happened, whereupon he cursed Sthūṇākarna to remain a female until the death of Śikhaṇḍin. Śikhaṇḍin therefore remained a male. In the sequel he killed Bhīṣma, because Bhīṣma would never regard him as any other than a woman and when attacked submitted without fighting back.

The idea that Yakṣas and similar creatures have this power persists in India to the present day, as one can see in the *Rose of Bakawali*,³¹ where a woman becomes a man by exchanging sex with a *div*. In some of the southern versions of the *Pañcatantra*³² there is a tale that in many points is similar to that analyzed above under the heading "Bathing in Enchanted Water," sub-heading B, "Change of Woman to Man." A king had a wife who bore him only daughters, and ten of them. He threatened to take another wife as chief queen, but at the urging of his wife's father, one of his ministers, he was persuaded to give her another chance. The minister took his daughter to his home for the lying-in; but when the child was born it was, to their distress, another girl. Nevertheless the minister did not give up hope. He announced to the king that a son and heir had been born, but added that the child had been born under an unlucky constellation, the evil effects of which could be obviated only by having the child remain out of the father's sight until at the age of twelve he should be anointed crown prince.³³ The wife and child remained at the minister's

³¹ See in translation by Garcin de Tassy, *Allégories*, p. 349.

³² SP§ Introduction, story 1 (translation by Hertel, *ZDMG* 61. 18), and Dubois's *Pantcha-Tantra*, Introduction, story 1.

³³ Keeping a child born under an unlucky constellation out of the father's sight until twelve years old is a commonplace notion; cf. story of Puran

house, where the child was successively put through the ceremonies accompanying birth, name-giving, eating of the first rice, hair-cutting, and initiation. At twelve, when the time had come for marriage, the minister took him (her) to Pataliputra and betrothed him to the king's daughter. The minister, his daughter, and the child then worshipped Kali and started home. On the way they came to a figtree (presumably the pipal tree, which is frequented by spirits and other non-human beings). This was the minister's opportunity. He summoned an exorciser and began rites for driving out the Rākṣasa that lived there. The demon was terrified and begged to be spared. Said the exorciser, "Only if you give this girl your male sex!" To save himself the demon consented; and so the minister, his daughter, and the grandchild all lived happily ever afterwards.³⁴

MAGIC OBJECTS AND CHARMS

Magic objects and spells are likewise potent to accomplish a change of sex. Yogis, the great magicians of India, are thought to have this ability,³⁵ while other persons who have mastered the magic art may also possess it. As a rule the spell or charm is accompanied by the taking of a pill, which is presumably allowed to remain in the mouth as long as it is desired that the change of sex should continue. When the pill is removed, the original sex is restored. In the fiction literature Mūladeva, that great picaresque figure, practices the magic art *par excellence*, frequently with a

Bhagat and Raja Rasalu, both of whom are treated thus: Swynnerton, *Romantic Tales from the Panjab with Indian Nights' Entertainment*, pp. 51, 52; Steel and Temple, *Tales of the Panjab* (a reëdition of *Wide-Awake Stories*), p. 236 f.

³⁴ In Dubois's version there are a number of variants, of which the most important is that the Rākṣasa fell in love with the grandchild before the marriage ceremonies were to take place. Taking advantage of this infatuation, the minister persuaded the Rākṣasa to exchange sexes with the grandchild for a few days. When the ceremonies were over and the time had come for the reëxchange of sexes, the demon declared that while he had been going about as a female, he had met a male Rākṣasa. The two were now enamored, and if matters could be arranged so, he (she) would prefer to keep the female sex. There was, of course, no difficulty made by the minister.

³⁵ Enthoven, *Folklore of Bombay*, p. 340.

definite leaning toward the malicious;³⁶ and a characteristic tale, Vetālapañcaviṃśati 14, revolves around the theme of change of sex.

A Brahman youth, Vāmanasvāmī by name, chances to see a princess Candraprabhā. Their eyes meet, they fall in love; then they separate; and in consequence of the separation they are both in danger of death. Vāmanasvāmī falls to the ground in a faint. At this point Mūladeva appears, with a friend Śaśī, an equal rascal. They learn of the affair, and Mūladeva offers to get Vāmanasvāmī his beloved. He gives the boy a magic pill to put in his mouth, which at once transforms him into a beautiful girl. He then takes a pill himself and becomes an aged Brahman. The two now present themselves at the palace, where Mūladeva tells the king, father of Candraprabhā, a long story to the final effect that this girl is his daughter-in-law, whom he wishes to leave for some time in the king's protection. With some misgiving the king finally accepts her, entrusting her to his own daughter, Candraprabhā, with the admonition not to part from her whether in eating or sleeping. At night the princess, despondent at her separation from the beautiful boy she has seen, tells her grief to Vāmanasvāmī. The later, removing the pill from his mouth, astonishes and delights her by becoming himself, and the two spend the next six months together most happily, he being a girl during the day and a man by night. At the end of this time the princess realizes that she is pregnant.

One day the king and his court go to a minister's house. The minister's son sees the counterfeit girl, falls in love with her, and announces that unless he can marry her he will die. The matter is brought to the king who refuses to give her to the minister's son on the ground that she is already married. But his councillors advise him not to refuse; for if the minister's son dies, the minister too will die, and if the minister dies, the kingdom will perish. The king agrees and gives the girl to the minister's son over her protest, but yields to her demand that the minister's son go on a six months' pilgrimage before the marriage may be consummated. When the minister's son starts out, he entrusts the girl to his first wife. At night the first wife complains that she is burning with desire but has no man to satisfy it. Vāmanasvāmī removes the pill, thus

³⁶ See paper by Bloomfield on "The Character and Adventures of Mūladeva," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 52. 616-650.

removing also the wife's difficulty; and the two dwell together until the minister's son is due back. Vāmanasvāmī then in his male form leaves the minister's son's house, and goes to report the affair to Mūladeva.

Mūladeva, taking another pill, again turns himself into an old Brahman, while he gives a second pill to his companion Śaśī, who then becomes a boy of sixteen. Going to the king, Mūladeva demands the girl he left with him a year back. The king cannot produce her; there is an uproar; and the Brahman threatens to curse him. But at last, to avoid the curse, the king gives Mūladeva his own daughter, the princess Candraprabhā, to be the alleged son's bride.

Vāmanasvāmī now comes to claim Candraprabhā, but to his surprise he finds that he too is to be victimized. Śaśī refuses to surrender her, saying that the king had given her to him in marriage before witnesses. "But she is pregnant by me!" protests Vāmanasvāmī. "No matter," replies Śaśī, "she is my wife." And Śaśī is right; for according to the Hindu law in such cases, so says the story, only the public marriage is valid.³⁷

The use of magic pills for accomplishing a change of sex is, next to bathing in enchanted water, the commonest means illustrated in the fiction. It appears in the Pañcadaṇḍachattraprabandha,³⁸ where three young women, separated from their husbands during a period of family misfortune, use magic pills (*guṭikā*) to change themselves to men, and thus keep themselves safe until they are reunited with their husbands. Again in Dharmacandra's *Malaya-sundarikathoddhāra* ³⁹ a magic pill is used to the accompaniment of certain rites to transform a woman into a man.⁴⁰

³⁷ This story, with variants, appears in the *Tutinameh*: Rosen's Turkish II. 178; Iken's Persian, p. 97; see also Pertsch in *ZDMG* 22. 539 ff. A fuller Indian version in the *Kathā Sarit Sāgara* (Tawney's translation II. 301 ff.). An echo appears in the *Śukasaptati* 62, where a beardless boy, disguised as a woman, is taken to the wives of a Rajput.

³⁸ See p. 77 of the text as edited and translated by Weber, *Abhandlungen der k. Akad. d. Wissenschaft zu Berlin*, 1877, Phil.-hist. Kl.

³⁹ See Hertel, *Indische Märchen*, p. 211 ff.

⁴⁰ In the *Kathāratnākara* (Hertel's translation, Vol. 1, p. 139) a transference of sex is made, but the text is not clear. It seems to imply that the transference was only pretended, being one merely of clothing; but Hertel, in a footnote, conjectures that the author of the text, in abbre-

The charm may be employed with the aid of other magic objects. Ambada, having changed a magician's wives into asses by giving them a magic fruit to eat, assumes the form of a woman to do the same to the magician himself.⁴¹ Again, in the Dharmakalpadruma 3. 6. 324 ff. a magic vegetable produces change of sex.⁴²

Even the mere spell may suffice. Thus in a Chinese Buddhist story from an Indian source⁴³ the half-brother of a certain king, who, it is prophesied, will kill the king and himself become the monarch, is pursued by the king's servants through many adventures, until at last he comes to his uncle an ascetic. This ascetic knows a spell by which change of sex may be accomplished, and this he gives to his nephew. The boy employs it; and in the guise of a beautiful woman captivates the king, who soon becomes a victim and is killed. The boy now reverses the charm, becomes a man again, and succeeds to the throne.

THE POWER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS OR WICKEDNESS

In Buddhist literature there are clearcut instances of change of sex resulting from either virtue or wickedness. The change from woman to man comes as the result of an Act of Truth⁴⁴ or by the favor of a saint to restore sex after a change from man to woman. The latter change comes from an impious wish.

The change in consequence of an Act of Truth is found in the Divyāvadāna, p. 473. The future Buddha was once a woman Rūpavatī. Chancing one day upon a starving woman who was about to devour her newborn child, Rūpavatī cut off her own breasts and gave them to the woman for food. Indra, fearing that Rūpavatī by this sacrifice might thrust him from his heavenly seat, went in

viating his original, failed to make clear that it was a real change effected by means of a magic pill.

⁴¹ Story translated by Krause, *Indische Erzähler* 4. 60. In the tale of Ambada this fruit and other means are used prolifically to effect physical transformations (see in the index s. v. "Verwandlung").

⁴² Hertel in *WZKM* 25. 179. Penzer, *Ocean of Story*, vol. 7, p. 223, refers to the *Kathākośa* (Tawney's translation, p. 110), where a girl puts a magic plant in her ear and immediately becomes a man.

⁴³ Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues* II. 410.

⁴⁴ For a brilliant discussion of the Act of Truth (Saccakiriya) see Burlingame in *JRAS* for 1917 (the story below appears on p. 451).

disguise to her, and asked, "Is it true that you sacrificed your breasts for the sake of a child?" "It is true." "Did you not, either in the act or after the act, regret so doing?" "No!" "Who will believe you?" Rūpāvati thereupon replies, "Then I will make an Act of Truth. If it be true that neither in the act nor after the act had I any feeling of remorse or regret; if it be true that I acted, not for the sake of dominion, not for the sake of worldly enjoyments, not for the sake of heaven, not that I might become an Indra or a Universal Monarch, but solely and only that I might attain Supreme Enlightenment, Buddhahood; thereby to subdue the unsubdued, to emancipate the unemancipated, to console the unconsolated, to enable them that have attained not Nirvana to attain unto Nirvana; if all this be true, then may I cease to be a woman and become a man." Straightway she ceased to be a woman and became a man Rūpāvata.

Again, a Chinese story from an Indian source⁴⁵ tells of the future Gotama Buddha born as a pious widow. This widow, a seller of oil, once gave a poor old monk the oil with which to light a lamp of offering. The lamp was so much appreciated by the Buddha of that day that he prophesied that the monk after many cycles of time would become the Dīpaṃkara (Light-Maker) Buddha. When the widow heard this, she too went to the Buddha of that day to ask what would be her reward for having given the monk the oil. Could she, too, gain the supreme knowledge? The Buddha replied that with the body of a woman she could never hope to gain the wisdom of a Buddha or of a Pratyeka Buddha. She would have to abandon her woman's body and get one that was pure. Returning home, the widow bathed, made the proper prostrations, and mounted a high tower where she took a vow:⁴⁶ "This unclean body I now present as a gift to all living beings suffering from hunger or thirst. May I succeed in obtaining a man's body and receive the prophecy of becoming a Buddha! All living beings who in this afflicted world are blind, who turn the back on truth, who lean toward heresy, who know not the Buddha, may I in this other state succor them!" So saying, she hurled herself from the tower, but the Buddha of that day, knowing her intention, caused the

⁴⁵ Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues* I. 263 ff.

⁴⁶ This vow seems to represent the Act of Truth of the Divyāvadāna story above.

earth to become soft, and the widow arose with a purified body, that of a male. Then the newly made man hastened to receive the prophecy, and in due time was born as the historical (Gotama) Buddha.

The reverse of this theme, change of man to woman in consequence of a wicked wish, appears in the Dhammapada Commentary III. 9.⁴⁷ In the city of Soreyya a treasurer's son named Soreyya, together with a certain intimate friend of his, sitting in a carriage, saw the Elder Maha Kaccayana putting on his mantle. When Soreyya saw the golden-hued body of the Elder, he thought to himself, "Oh that this Elder might become my wife! Else may the hue of my wife's body become like the hue of his body!" The instant this wicked thought passed through his mind Soreyya was transformed from a man to a woman. Embarrassed she fled toward Takkasila. On the way she associated herself with a caravan, whose proprietors arranged a match between her and the son of the treasurer of Takkasila. As his wife she had two sons, who in addition to the two sons she had had in the city Soreyya as a man, made her the parent of four.

One day the young man who had been Soreyya's companion at the time he was changed to a woman arrived in Takkasila. The woman Soreyya saw him passing below her house in the street, recognized him, summoned him to her house, showed him great hospitality, and finally revealed herself. The friend then undertook to get Soreyya changed back to a man. He induced the Elder Kaccayana to come to Soreyya's house for alms. At the conclusion of the feast, he took the woman and caused her to prostrate herself before the Elder's feet, and said, "Reverend Sir, pardon my friend." Said the Elder, "What does this mean?" Said the friend, "Reverend Sir, this woman used to be my dearest male friend. One day he looked upon you and thought this and that and was immediately transformed from a man into a woman. Pardon her, Reverend Sir." Said the Elder, "Very well, rise. I pardon you." As soon as the Elder uttered these words, Soreyya was transformed from a woman into a man.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Translated by Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends* II. 23 ff.

⁴⁸ There is a sequel to the tale telling how Soreyya entered the order. His strange story having become noised abroad, people would ask him for which pair of sons he had the stronger affection, those of which he was the

ORIGIN OF THE NOTION OF SEX CHANGE

The usage in fiction of the notion of sex change rests clearly on ideas enumerated above. Folk beliefs, magic and popular religion, even systematized religion furnish beliefs that can be utilized by fiction. To trace the origin of the idea itself is more difficult. There are a large number of phenomena that present themselves in this connection. There is, first, the frequent desire of members of one sex to belong to the other. Stories embodying such a change, especially the change of woman to man, in many cases cater to this desire as mere wish fulfilment. Again, there are definite types of sexual perversion that might supply a starting point for the notion. All over the Orient there are eunuchs who imitate women in dress, occupation, and in fact every way possible, and engage in perverted sexual practices. It is not necessary to go to the literature to find instances of such; they may be seen in all parts of India. Other customs resting on popular superstition or religion illustrate the attempt of one sex to impersonate the other. Quite frequently in India, as in many other parts of the world, parents will give their sons the names of girls in order that malevolent spirits may therefore regard them as worthless and not worth molesting or as a prophylactic.⁴⁹

Sometimes adults too assume the appearance of the other sex to escape misfortune or the unfavorable attention of superior powers. Such a custom exists among the Lushais:⁵⁰ "One extraordinary custom among the Lushais which I would not have believed had I not had personal knowledge of the fact is that men and women change their sex in all outward appearances and customs. I give

father or those of which he was the mother. He would invariably answer those of which he was the mother. At last he attained Arahatsip. After that when asked the question, he answered, "My affections are set on no one." The monks complained to the Buddha that Soreyya was uttering falsehood, but the Buddha explained that his change of reply was due to his attainment of enlightenment.

⁴⁹ For such pretended change of sex, see Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1926), p. 279.

⁵⁰ An anonymous contributor in the *Pioneer Mail*, May, 1890, reprinted in the *Indian Antiquary* 32. 413; mentioned in Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1926), p. 279. The same phenomenon reported in Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India* (London, 1870), p. 255.

as an instance a woman who has twice accompanied a chief to see me and who is dressed as a man, smokes a man's pipe, goes out hunting with them, lives with them, and has in every way adapted herself to the habits of men. She actually married a young girl, who lived with her for one year. I myself asked in the presence of several chiefs and other Lushais why she had, being a woman, become a man. She at first denied being a woman, but when I suggested that we should change coats she demurred and finally confessed that she was a woman, but that her *khua-vang* was not good and so she became a man. I have heard of other cases in which men have adopted the dress and customs of women."⁵¹

This seems clearly to be a case in which the change of sex meant an escape from superhuman malevolence. Other religious practices in India illustrate pretended change of sex. Among certain Krishna sects, especially the Vallabhas in southern India, men impersonate women to win the attentions of the deity, recalling the tales of his amours with the milkmaids.⁵² By the imagined physical union with Krishna is erotically symbolized the union of the soul with its lord.⁵³

⁵¹ In the adventures of Ambada, translated by Krause, *Indische Erzähler* IV. 43, is described a land of Amazons, where men do the work of women, carrying the water pots, and the women act like men riding on horses.

⁵² Monier Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism*, p. 136.

⁵³ The common belief that a being may be of different sex in different existences has no vital connection with the theme of this paper, but an illustration of it is possibly worth quoting. In the story of Soreyya analyzed above there is a digression as follows (Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends* II. 24): "For there are no men who have not, at some time or other, been women; and no women who have not, at some time or other, been men. For example, men who have sinned with the wives of other men are after death tormented in Hell for hundreds of thousands of years, and upon resuming human estate are reborn as women during a hundred successive states of existence. For even the Elder Ananada, who fulfilled the Perfections for a hundred thousand cycles of time and was a Noble Disciple, reborn as a blacksmith in a certain state of existence, as he passed from one state of existence to another in the round of existences, sinned with the wife of another man. As a result he suffered torment in Hell, and thereafter, because the fruit of his evil deed was not yet exhausted, he was obliged to spend fourteen existences as the wife of another man, and seven existences in addition, before the effect of his evil deed was completely exhausted. On the other hand women, by bestowing alms and performing other works of merit, by putting away desire to continue

While pretended change of sex in a legitimate religious connection may be a virtue, the fiction points out that it must be handled with due circumspection, otherwise it may prove disastrous. In the *Mahābhārata* 16. 1 it is told how certain irreverent persons took a man named Sāmba to some sages, dressing him as a woman, and claiming that he was the wife of a king who wanted offspring. They asked the sages what the offspring would be. The sages at once penetrated the deceit, and in their wrath cursed Sāmba to bring forth a bolt, or pestle (*musala*), which was destined to destroy his race.

Further than mere pretense of a change of sex, there are physiological phenomena that might be mentioned in this connection, especially hermaphroditism.⁵⁴ Even in religion there are manifestations of this, as in the hermaphroditic form of Shiva (*ardhanārīśvara*);⁵⁵ while, beyond this, there are instances of the phenomenon in life itself quite outside the religious sphere.⁵⁶

We need not press too far to find a source for the idea. From all these spheres of thought and experience fiction has taken the notion and then with a freedom that is of its very nature it has adapted the idea to its varying needs.

in existence longer as women, by forming the resolution, 'May this work of merit of ours avail to procure for us rebirth as men,' obtain rebirth as men after death. Likewise wives who conduct themselves properly towards their husbands obtain rebirth as men." The notion is current among the folk to the present day (Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, 1926, p. 279, quoting from Russell, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces* II. 500).

⁵⁴ An effort to find belief in bisexuality among the early Indo-Europeans is made by Güntert, *Der arische Weltkönig und Heiland*, pp. 315 ff., and criticized by Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda* II. 619 ff.

⁵⁵ Penzer, *Ocean of Story*, vol. 7, p. 231, gives a number of instances of Semitic deities changing from one sex to the other; an additional instance is reported by Barton, *JAOS* 46. 231.

⁵⁶ Penzer, *Ocean of Story*, vol. 7, p. 233, also refers to teratological phenomena, mentioning Burton's "Notes on an Hermaphrodite" in *Mem. Anth. Soc. London* 2. 262 f.; and E. Schwalbe, *Morphologie der Missbildungen*.